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THE
CORRESPONDENCE

BETWEEN THE

Commissioners of the State of So. Ca.

TO THE

GOVERNMENT AT WASHINGTON

AND

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES;

TOGETHER WITH THE

STATEMENT OF MESSRS. MILES AND KEITT.

PRINTED BY ORDER OF THE CONVENTION.

CHARLESTON:

EVANS & COGSWELL, PRINTERS TO THE CONVENTION,
No. 3 Broad and 103 East Bay Street.

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[LETTER OF THE COMMISSIONERS TO THE PRESIDENT.]

WASHINGTON, 28th DECEMBER, 1860.

Sir: We have the honor to transmit to you a copy of the full powers from the Convention of the People of South Carolina, under which we are "authorized and empowered to treat with the Government of the United States for the delivery of the forts, magazines, light houses and other real estate, with their appurtenances, within the limits of South Carolina, and also for an apportionment of the public debt and for a division of all other property held by the Government of the United States as agent of the confederated States, of which South Carolina was recently a member; and generally to negotiate as to all other measures and arrangements proper to be made and adopted in the existing relation of the parties, and for the continuance of peace and amity between this commonwealth and the Government at Washington."

In the execution of this trust, it is our duty to furnish you, as we now do, with an official copy of the Ordinance of Secession, by which the State of South Carolina has resumed the powers she delegated to the Government of the United States and has declared her perfect sovereignty and independence.

It would also have been our duty to have informed you that we were ready to negotiate with you upon all such questions as are necessarily raised by the adoption of this ordinance, and that we were prepared to enter upon this negotiation with the earnest desire to avoid all unnecessary and hostile collision, and so to inaugurate our new relations as to secure mutual respect, general advantage and a future of good will and harmony beneficial to all the parties concerned.

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But the events of the last twenty-four hours render such an assurance impossible. We came here the representatives of an authority which could, at any time within the past sixty days, have taken possession of the forts in Charleston harbor, but which, upon pledges given in a manner that, we cannot doubt, determined to trust to your honor rather than to its own power. Since our arrival here an officer of the United States, acting, as we are assured, not only without but against your orders, has dismantled one fort and occupied another, thus altering, to a most important extent, the condition of affairs under which we came.

Until these circumstances are explained in a manner which relieves us of all doubt as to the spirit in which these negotiations shall be conducted, we are forced to suspend all discussion as to any arrangements by which our mutual interests might be amicably adjusted.

And, in conclusion, we would urge upon you the immediate withdrawal of the troops from the harbor of Charleston. Under present circumstances, they are a standing menace which renders negotiation impossible, and, as our recent experience shews, threatens speedily to bring to a bloody issue questions which ought to be settled with temperance and judgment.

We have the honor, Sir, to be,

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servants,

R. W. BARNWELL,

J. H. ADAMS.

JAMES L. ORR,

Commissioners.

To the PRESIDENT

of the United States.

[REPLY OF THE PRESIDENT TO THE COMMISSIONERS.]

WASHINGTON CITY, 30th December, 1860.

Gentlemen : I have the honor to receive your communication of 28th inst., together with a copy of your "full powers from the Convention of the People of South Carolina," authorising you to treat with the Government of the United States on various important subjects therein mentioned, and also a copy of the Ordinance bearing date on the 20th instant, declaring that "the Union now subsisting between South Carolina and other States under the name of 'the United States of America,' is hereby dissolved."

In answer to this communication, I have to say, that my position as President of the United States was clearly defined in the message to Congress of the 3d instant. In that I stated that, "apart from the execution of the laws, so far as this may be practicable, the Executive has no authority to decide what shall be the relations between the Federal Government and South Carolina. He has been invested with no such discretion. He possesses no power to change the relations heretofore existing between them, much less to acknowledge the independence of that State. This would be to invest a mere executive officer with the power of recognizing the dissolution of the Confederacy among our thirty-three sovereign States. It bears no resemblance to the recognition of a foreign *de facto* government—involving no such responsibility. Any attempt to do this would, on his part, be a naked act of usurpation. It is, therefore, my duty to submit to Congress the whole question, in all its bearings."

Such is my opinion still. I could, therefore, meet you only as private gentlemen of the highest character, and was entirely willing to communicate to Congress any proposition you might have to make to that body upon the subject. Of this you were well aware. It was my earnest

desire, that such a disposition might be made of the whole subject by Congress, who alone possess the power, as to prevent the inauguration of a civil war between the parties in regard to the possession of the Federal Forts in the harbor of Charleston; and I therefore deeply regret, that, in your opinion, "the events of the last twenty-four hours render this impossible." In conclusion, you urge upon me "the immediate withdrawal of the troops from the harbor of Charleston," stating that, "under present circumstances, they are a standing menace which renders negotiation impossible, and as our recent experience shows, threatens speedily to bring to a bloody issue, questions which ought to be settled with temperance and judgment."

The reason for this change in your position is, that since your arrival in Washington, "an officer of the United States, acting as we (you) are assured, not only without, but against your (my) orders, has dismantled one fort and occupied another, thus altering, to a most important extent, the condition of affairs under which we (you) came." You also allege that you came here "the representatives of an authority which could, at any time, within the past sixty days have taken possession of the forts in Charleston harbor, but which, upon pledges given in a manner that we (you) cannot doubt, determined to trust to your (my) honor rather than to its own power."

This brings me to a consideration of the nature of those alleged pledges, and in what manner they have been observed. In my message of the third of December last, I stated, in regard to the property of the United States in South Carolina, that it "has been purchased for a fair equivalent 'by the consent of the Legislature of the State,' 'for the erection of forts, magazines, arsenals,' &c., and over these the authority 'to exercise exclusive legislation' has been expressly granted by the Constitution to Congress. It is not believed that any attempt will be made to expel the United States from this property by force; but if in this I should prove to be mistaken, the officer in command of the forts has received orders to act strictly on the defen-

sive. In such a contingency, the responsibility for consequences would rightfully rest upon the heads of the assailants." This being the condition of the parties, on Saturday, 8th December, four of the representatives from South Carolina called upon me and requested an interview. We had an earnest conversation on the subject of these forts, and the best means of preventing a collision between the parties for the purpose of sparing the effusion of blood. I suggested, for prudential reasons, that it would be best to put in writing what they said to me verbally. They did so accordingly, and on Monday morning, the 10th instant, three of them presented to me a paper signed by all the representatives from South Carolina, with a single exception, of which the following is a copy:

To His Excellency JAMES BUCHANAN,
President of the United States:

In compliance with our statement to you yesterday, we now express to you our strong convictions that neither the constituted authorities, nor any body of the people of the State of South Carolina, will either attack or molest the United States Forts, in the harbor of Charleston, previously to the action of the Convention, and we hope and believe, not until an offer has been made, through an accredited representative, to negotiate for an amicable arrangement of all matters between the State and the Federal Government, provided that no reinforcements shall be sent into those forts, and their relative military *status* shall remain as at present.

JNO. McQUEEN,
 WM. PORCHER MILES,
 M. L. BONHAM,
 W. W. BOYCE,
 LAWRENCE M. KEITT.

WASHINGTON, 9th Dec., 1860.

And here I must, in justice to myself, remark, that at the time the paper was presented to me, I objected to the

word "provided," as it might be construed into an agreement, on my part, which I never would make. They said that nothing was farther from their intention—they did not so understand it, and I should not so consider it. It is evident they could enter into no reciprocal agreement with me on the subject. They did not profess to have authority to do this, and were acting in their individual character. I considered it as nothing more, in effect, than the promise of highly honorable gentlemen to exert their influence for the purpose expressed. The event has proven that they have faithfully kept this promise, although I have never since received a line from any one of them, or from any member of the Convention, on the subject. It is well known that it was my determination, and this I freely expressed, not to reinforce the forts in the harbor, and thus produce a collision, until they had been actually attacked, or until I had certain evidence that they were about to be attacked. This paper I received most cordially, and considered it as a happy omen that peace might still be preserved, and that time might thus be gained for reflection. This is the whole foundation for the alleged pledge.

But I acted in the same manner I would have done had I entered into a positive and formal agreement with parties capable of contracting, although such an agreement would have been, on my part, from the nature of my official duties, impossible.

The world knows that I have never sent any reinforcements to the forts in Charleston harbor, and I have certainly never authorized any change to be made "in their relative military status."

Bearing upon this subject, I refer you to an order issued by the Secretary of War, on the 11th inst., to Major Anderson, but not brought to my notice until the 21st instant. It is as follows:

"Memorandum of verbal instructions to Major ANDERSON, 1st Artillery, Commanding Fort Moultrie, S. C.

You are aware of the great anxiety of the Secretary of

War that a collision of the troops with the people of this State shall be avoided, and of his studied determination to pursue a course with reference to the military force and forts in this harbor, which shall guard against such a collision. He has, therefore, carefully abstained from increasing the force at this point, or taking any measures which might add to the present excited state of the public mind, or which would throw any doubt on the confidence he feels that South Carolina will not attempt by violence to obtain possession of the public works, or interfere with their occupancy. But as the counsel and acts of rash and impulsive persons may possibly disappoint these expectations of the Government, he deems it proper that you should be prepared with instructions to meet so unhappy a contingency. He has, therefore, directed me, verbally, to give you such instructions.

You are carefully to avoid every act which would needlessly tend to provoke aggression; and, for that reason, you are not, without evident and imminent necessity, to take up any position which could be construed into the assumption of a hostile attitude; but you are to hold possession of the forts in this harbor, and, if attacked, you are to defend yourself to the last extremity. The smallness of your force will not permit you, perhaps, to occupy more than one of the three forts; but an attack on, or attempt to take possession of either of them, will be regarded as an act of hostility, and you may then put your command into either of them which you may deem most proper, to increase its power of resistance. You are also authorized to take similar defensive steps whenever you have tangible evidence of a design to proceed to a hostile act.

D. P. BUTLER, *Assistant Adjutant General.*

FORT MOULTRIE, S. C., Dec. 11, 1860."

This is in conformity to my instructions to Major Buell.

JOHN B. FLOYD, *Secretary of War.*

These were the last instructions transmitted to Major Anderson before his removal to Fort Sumter, with a single exception in regard to a particular which does not, in any degree, affect the present question. Under these circumstances, it is clear that Major Anderson acted upon his own responsibility, and without authority, unless, indeed, he had "tangible evidence of a design to proceed to a hostile act," on the part of the authorities of South Carolina, which has not yet been alleged. Still, he is a brave and honorable officer; and justice requires that he should not be condemned without a fair hearing.

Be this as it may, when I learned that Major Anderson had left Fort Moultrie, and proceeded to Fort Sumter, my first promptings were to command him to return to his former position, and there to await the contingencies presented in his instructions. This could only have been done, with any degree of safety to the command, by the concurrence of the South Carolina authorities. But, before any steps could possibly have been taken in this direction, we received information, dated on the 28th instant, that "the Palmetto flag floated out to the breeze at Castle Pinckney, and a large military force went over last night (the 27th) to Fort Moultrie." Thus the authorities of South Carolina, without waiting or asking for any explanation, and doubtless believing, as you have expressed it, that the officer had acted not only without, but against my orders, on the very next day after the night when the removal was made, seized, by a military force, two of the three federal forts in the harbor of Charleston, and have covered them under their own flag, instead of that of the United States. At this gloomy period of our history, startling events succeed each other rapidly. On the very day (the 27th instant) that possession of these two forts was taken, the Palmetto flag was raised over the federal Custom House and Post Office in Charleston; and, on the same day, every officer of the Customs—Collector, Naval Officers, Surveyor and Appraisers—resigned their offices. And this, although it was well known, from the language of my message, that, as an executive officer, I felt myself bound to collect the revenue at the

port of Charleston under the existing laws. In the harbor of Charleston, we now find three forts confronting each other, over all of which the federal flag floated only four days ago; but now, over two of them, this flag has been supplanted, and the Palmetto flag has been substituted in its stead. It is, under all these circumstances, that I am urged immediately to withdraw the troops from the harbor of Charleston, and am informed that without this, negotiation is impossible. This I cannot do; this I will not do. Such an idea was never thought of by me in any possible contingency. No allusion to it had ever been made in any communication between myself and any human being. But the inference is, that I am bound to withdraw the troops from the only fort remaining in the possession of the United States in the harbor of Charleston, because the officer then in command of all the forts thought proper, without instructions, to change his position from one of them to another. I cannot admit the justice of any such inference.

At this point of writing, I have received information, by telegram, from Captain Humphreys, in command of the Arsenal at Charleston, "that it has to-day (Sunday, the 30th) been taken by force of arms." It is estimated that the munitions of war belonging to the United States in this Arsenal are worth half a million of dollars.

Comment is needless. After this information, I have only to add, that, whilst it is my duty to defend Fort Sumter, as a portion of the public property of the United States against hostile attacks from whatever quarter they may come, by such means as I may possess for this purpose, I do not perceive how such a defence can be construed into a menace against the City of Charleston.

With great personal regard, I remain

Yours, very respectfully,

JAMES BUCHANAN.

To Honorable

ROBERT W. BARNWELL,

JAMES H. ADAMS,

JAMES L. ORR.

[REPLY OF THE COMMISSIONERS TO THE PRESIDENT.]

WASHINGTON, D. C.,
January 1st, 1861.

Sir: We have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 30th December, in reply to a note addressed by us to you on the 28th of the same month, as Commissioners from South Carolina.

In reference to the declaration with which your reply commences, that "your position as President of the United States was clearly defined in the Message to Congress of the 3d instant," that you possess "no power to change the relations heretofore existing" between South Carolina and the United States, "much less to acknowledge the independence of that State;" and that, consequently, you could meet us only as private gentlemen of the highest character, with an entire willingness to communicate to Congress any proposition we might have to make, we deem it only necessary to say, that the State of South Carolina having, in the exercise of that great right of self-government which underlies all our political organizations, declared herself sovereign and independent, we, as her representatives, felt no special solicitude as to the character in which you might recognize us. Satisfied that the State had simply exercised her unquestionable right, we were prepared, in order to reach substantial good, to waive the formal considerations which your constitutional scruples might have prevented you from extending. We came here, therefore, expecting to be received as you did receive us, and perfectly content with that entire willingness of which you assured us, to submit any proposition to Congress which we might have to make upon the subject of the independence of the State. That willingness was ample recognition of the condition of public affairs which rendered our pres-

ence necessary. In this position, however, it is our duty, both to the State which we represent and to ourselves, to correct several important misconceptions of our letter into which you have fallen.

You say, "It was my earnest desire that such a disposition might be made of the whole subject by Congress, who alone possesses the power to prevent the inauguration of a civil war between the parties in regard to the possession of the federal forts in the harbor of Charleston; and I, therefore, deeply regret that, in your opinion, 'the events of the last twenty-four hours render this impossible.'" We expressed no such opinion, and the language which you quote as ours, is altered in its sense by the omission of a most important part of the sentence. What we did say was: "But the events of the last twenty-four hours render *such an assurance* impossible." Place that "assurance" as contained in our letter, in the sentence, and we are prepared to repeat it.

Again, professing to quote our language, you say:—"Thus the authorities of South Carolina, without waiting or asking for any explanation, and, doubtless, believing, as you have expressed it, that the officer had acted not only without, but against my orders," &c. We expressed no such opinion in reference to the belief of the people of South Carolina. The language which you have quoted, was applied solely and entirely to *our assurance*, obtained here, and based, as you well know, upon your own declaration—a declaration which, at that time, it was impossible for the authorities of South Carolina to have known. But, without following this letter into all its details, we propose only to meet the chief points of the argument.

Some weeks ago, the State of South Carolina declared her intention, in the existing condition of public affairs, to secede from the United States. She called a Convention of her people, to put her declaration in force. The Convention met, and passed the Ordinance of Secession. All this you anticipated, and your course of action was thoroughly considered. In your annual message, you declared

you had no right, and would not attempt, to coerce a seceding State, but that you were bound by your constitutional oath, and would defend the property of the United States within the borders of South Carolina, if an attempt was made to take it by force. Seeing very early that this question of property was a difficult and delicate one, you manifested a desire to settle it without collision. You did not reinforce the garrisons in the harbor of Charleston. You removed a distinguished and veteran officer from the command of Fort Moultrie, because he attempted to increase his supply of ammunition. You refused to send additional troops to the same garrison when applied for by the officer appointed to succeed him. You accepted the resignation of the oldest and most eminent member of your Cabinet, rather than allow these garrisons to be strengthened. You compelled an officer stationed at Fort Sumter, to return immediately to the Arsenal, forty muskets which he had taken to arm his men. You expressed not to one, but to many, of the most distinguished of our public characters, whose testimony will be placed upon the record, whenever it is necessary, your anxiety for a peaceful termination of this controversy, and your willingness not to disturb the military status of the forts, if Commissioners should be sent to the Government, whose communications you promised to submit to Congress. You received and acted on assurances from the highest official authorities of South Carolina, that no attempt would be made to disturb your possession of the forts and property of the United States, if you would not disturb their existing condition until Commissioners had been sent, and the attempt to negotiate had failed. You took from the members of the House of Representatives, a written memorandum that no such attempt should be made, "provided that no reinforcements shall be sent into those forts, and their relative military status shall remain as at present." And, although you attach no force to the acceptance of such a paper, although you "considered it as nothing more in effect than the promise of highly honorable gentlemen," as an obligation

on one side without corresponding obligation on the other, it must be remembered (if we are rightly informed) that you were pledged, if you ever did send reinforcements, to return it to those from whom you had received it before you executed your resolution. You sent orders to your officers, commanding them strictly to follow a line of conduct in conformity with such an understanding.

Beside all this, you had received formal and official notice from the Governor of South Carolina, that we had been appointed Commissioners, and were on our way to Washington. You knew the implied condition under which we came; our arrival was notified to you, and an hour appointed for an interview. We arrived in Washington on Wednesday, at three o'clock, and you appointed an interview with us at one the next day. Early on that day, Thursday, the news was received here of the movement of Major Anderson. That news was communicated to you immediately, and you postponed our meeting until half-past two o'clock, on Friday, in order that you might consult your Cabinet. On Friday we saw you, and we called upon you then to redeem your pledge. You could not deny it. With the facts we have stated, and in the face of the crowning and conclusive fact, that your Secretary of War had resigned his seat in the Cabinet, upon the publicly avowed ground that the action of Major Anderson had violated the pledged faith of the Government, and that unless the pledge was instantly redeemed, he was dishonored; denial was impossible; you did not deny it. You do not deny it now, but you seek to escape from its obligation on two grounds: 1st, That *we* terminated all negotiation by demanding, as a preliminary, the withdrawal of the United States troops from the harbor of Charleston; and 2d, That the authorities of South Carolina, instead of asking explanation, and giving you the opportunity to vindicate yourself, took possession of other property of the United States. We will examine both.

In the first place, we deny positively, that we have ever, in any way, made any such demand. Our letter is in your possession; it will stand by this on the record. In it, we

inform you of the objects of our mission. We say that it would have been our duty to have assured you of our readiness to commence negotiations with the most earnest and anxious desire to settle all questions between us amicably, and to our mutual advantage, but that events had rendered that assurance impossible. We stated the events, and we said that, until some satisfactory explanation of these events was given us, we could not proceed, and then, having made this request for explanation, we added, "and, in conclusion, we would urge upon you the immediate withdrawal of the troops from the harbor of Charleston. Under present circumstances they are a standing menace, which renders negotiation impossible," &c. "Under present circumstances!" What circumstances? Why, clearly, the occupation of Fort Sumter, and the dismantling of Fort Moultrie by Major Anderson, in the face of your pledges, and without explanation or practical disavowal. And there is nothing in the letter, which would or could have prevented you from declining to withdraw the troops, and offering the restoration of the status to which you were pledged, if such had been your desire. It would have been wiser and better, in our opinion, to have withdrawn the troops, and this opinion we urged upon you, but we *demand*ed nothing but such an explanation of the events of the last twenty-four hours as would restore our confidence in the spirit with which the negotiation should be conducted. In relation to this withdrawal of the troops from the harbor, we are compelled, however, to notice one passage of your letter. Referring to it, you say: "This I cannot do. This I will not do. Such an idea was never thought of by me in any possible contingency. No allusion to it had ever been made in any communication between myself and any human being."

In reply to this statement, we are compelled to say, that your conversation with us left upon our minds the distinct impression that you did seriously contemplate the withdrawal of the troops from Charleston harbor. And, in support of this impression, we would add that we have the positive assurance of gentlemen of the highest possible

public reputation, and the most unsullied integrity—men whose name and fame, secured by long service and patriotic achievement, place their testimony beyond cavil—that such suggestions had been made to, and urged upon you by them, and had formed the subject of more than one earnest discussion with you. And it was this knowledge that induced us to urge upon you a policy which had to recommend it, its own wisdom and the weight of such authority. As to the second point, that the authorities of South Carolina, instead of asking explanations, and giving you the opportunity to vindicate yourself, took possession of other property of the United States, we would observe, 1st. That, even if this were so, it does not avail you for defence, for the opportunity for decision was afforded you before these facts occurred. We arrived in Washington on Wednesday. The news from Major Anderson reached here early on Thursday, and was immediately communicated to you. All that day, men of the highest consideration—men who had striven successfully to lift you to your great office—who had been your tried and true friends through the troubles of your administration—sought you, and entreated you to act—to act at once. They told you that every hour complicated your position. They only asked you to give the assurance that, if the facts were so—that, if the commander had acted without, and against your orders, and in violation of your pledges, that you would restore the *status* you had pledged your honor to maintain.

You refused to decide. Your Secretary at War—your immediate and proper adviser in this whole matter—waited anxiously for your decision, until he felt that delay was becoming dishonor. More than twelve hours passed, and two Cabinet meetings had adjourned before you knew what the authorities of South Carolina had done, and your prompt decision at any moment of that time, would have avoided the subsequent complications. But if you had known the acts of the authorities of South Carolina, should that have prevented your keeping your faith? What was the condition of things? For the last sixty days, you have had in Charleston harbor, not force enough to hold the

forts against an equal enemy. Two of them were empty; one of those two, the most important in the harbor. It could have been taken at any time. You ought to know better than any man, that it would have been taken, but for the efforts of those who put their trust in your honor. Believing that they were threatened by Fort Sumter especially, the people were, with difficulty, restrained from securing, without blood, the possession of this important fortress. After many and reiterated assurances given on your behalf, which we cannot believe unauthorized, they determined to forbear, and in good faith sent on their Commissioners to negotiate with you. They meant you no harm; wished you no ill. They thought of you kindly, believed you true, and were willing, as far as was consistent with duty, to spare you unnecessary and hostile collision. Scarcely had their Commissioners left, than Major Anderson waged war. No other words will describe his action. It was not a peaceful change from one fort to another; it was a hostile act in the highest sense—one only justified in the presence of a superior enemy, and in imminent peril. He abandoned his position, spiked his guns, burned his gun-carriages, made preparations for the destruction of his post, and withdrew under cover of the night to a safer position. This was war. No man could have believed (without your assurance) that any officer could have taken such a step, “not only without orders, but against orders.” What the State did, was in simple self-defence; for this act, with all its attending circumstances, was as much war as firing a volley; and war being thus begun, until those commencing it explained their action, and disavowed their intention, there was no room for delay; and, even at this moment, while we are writing, it is more than probable, from the tenor of your letter, that reinforcements are hurrying on to the conflict, so that when the first gun shall be fired, there will have been, on your part, one continuous consistent series of actions commencing in a demonstration essentially warlike, supported by regular reinforcement, and terminating in defeat or victory. And all this without the slightest provocation; for, among the many things which you

have said, there is one thing you cannot say—you have waited anxiously for news from the seat of war, in hopes that delay would furnish some excuse for this precipitation. But this “tangible evidence of a design to proceed to a hostile act, on the part of the authorities of South Carolina,” (which is the only justification of Major Anderson,) you are forced to admit “has not *yet* been alleged.” But you have decided. You have resolved to hold by force what you have obtained through our misplaced confidence, and by refusing to disavow the action of Major Anderson, have converted his violation of orders into a legitimate act of your Executive authority. Be the issue what it may, of this we are assured, that, if Fort Moultrie has been recorded in history as a memorial of Carolina gallantry, Fort Sumter will live upon the succeeding page as an imperishable testimony of Carolina faith.

By your course, you have probably rendered civil war inevitable. Be it so. If you choose to force this issue upon us, the State of South Carolina will accept it, and, relying upon Him who is the God of justice as well as the God of hosts, will endeavor to perform the great duty which lies before her, hopefully, bravely and thoroughly.

Our mission being one for negotiation and peace, and your note leaving us without hope of a withdrawal of the troops from Fort Sumter, or of the restoration of the *status quo* existing at the time of our arrival, and intimating, as we think, your determination to reinforce the garrison in the harbor of Charleston, we respectfully inform you that we propose returning to Charleston on to-morrow afternoon.

We have the honor to be, sir, very respectfully,

Your obedient servants,

R. W. BARNWELL,

J. H. ADAMS,

JAMES L. ORR.

Commissioners.

To his Excellency, the PRESIDENT

of the United States.

The last communication is endorsed as follows:

EXECUTIVE MANSION,

3½ o'clock, Wednesday.

This paper, just presented to the President, is of such a character that he declines to receive it.

STATEMENT

OF MESSRS. MILES AND KEITT, OF WHAT TRANSPIRED
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND THE SOUTH
CAROLINA DELEGATION.

In compliance with the request of the Convention, we beg leave to make the following statement :

On Saturday, the 8th of December, several of the South Carolina delegation, including ourselves, waited upon the President. At this time, there was a growing belief that reinforcements were on the eve of being sent to the forts in Charleston harbor. It was known that the subject was frequently and earnestly discussed in the Cabinet. It was rumored that General Cass and Mr. Holt were urgent that reinforcements should be sent. Upon our being announced, the President, who was then in Cabinet Council, came out to us in the ante-room. We at once entered into a conversation upon the topic, which was so closely occupying his thoughts as well as ours. The President seemed much disturbed and moved. He told us that he had had a painful interview with the wife of Major Anderson, who had come on from New York to see him. She had manifested great anxiety and distress at the situation of her husband, whom she seemed to consider in momentary danger of an attack from an excited and lawless mob. The President professed to feel a deep responsibility resting upon him to protect the lives of Major Anderson and his command. We told him

that the news that reinforcements were on their way to Charleston, would be the surest means of provoking what Mrs. Anderson apprehended, and what he so much deprecated. We said, further, that we did not believe that Major Anderson was in any danger of such an attack; that the general sentiment of the State was against any such proceeding. That, prior to the action of the State Convention, then only ten days off, we felt satisfied that there would be no attempt to molest the forts in any way. That, after the Convention met,—while we could not possibly undertake to say what that body would see fit to do,—we yet hoped and believed that nothing would be done until we had first endeavored, by duly accredited Commissioners, to negotiate for a peaceful settlement of all matters, including the delivery of the forts, between South Carolina and the Federal Government. At the same time, we again reiterated our solemn belief that any change in the then existing condition of things in Charleston harbor, would, in the excited state of feeling at home, inevitably precipitate a collision. The impression made upon us was, that the President was wavering, and had not decided what course he would pursue. He said he was glad to have had this conversation with us, but would prefer that we should give him a written memorandum of the substance of what we had said. This we did on Monday, the 10th. It was in these words:

To his Excellency JAMES BUCHANAN,
President of the United States:

In compliance with our statement to you yesterday, we now express to you our strong convictions that neither the constituted authorities, nor any body of the people of the State of South Carolina, will either attack or molest the United States forts in the harbor of Charleston, previously to the action of the Convention, and we hope and believe not until an offer has been made through an accredited representative, to negotiate for an amicable arrangement of all matters between the State and the federal Government,

provided that no reinforcements shall be sent into those forts, and their relative military status shall remain as at present.

JOHN McQUEEN,
WM. PORCHER MILES,
M. L. BONHAM,
W. W. BOYCE,
LAWRENCE M. KEITT.

WASHINGTON, 9th December, 1860.

The President did not like the word "provided," because it looked as if we were binding him while avowing that we had no authority to commit the Convention. We told him that we did not so understand it. We were expressing our convictions and belief, predicated upon the maintenance of a certain condition of things, which maintenance was absolutely and entirely *in his power*. If he maintained such condition, then we believed that collision would be avoided until the attempt at a peaceable negotiation had failed. If he did not, then we solemnly assured him that we believed collision must inevitably, and at once, be precipitated. He seemed satisfied, and said it was not his intention to send reinforcements, or make any change. We explained to him what we meant by the words "relative military status," as applied to the forts; mentioned the difference between Major Anderson's occupying his then position at Fort Moultrie, and throwing himself into Fort Sumter. We stated that the latter step would be equivalent to reinforcing the garrison, and would just as certainly as the sending of fresh troops, lead to the result which we both desired to avoid. When we rose to go, the President said in substance, "After all, this is a matter of honor among gentlemen. I do not know that any paper or writing is necessary. We understand each other." One of the delegation, just before leaving the room, remarked, "Mr. President, you have determined to let things remain as they are, and not to send reinforcements; but, suppose that you were hereafter to

change your policy for any reason, what then? That would put us, who are willing to use our personal influence to prevent any attack upon the forts before Commissioners are sent on to Washington, in rather an embarrassing position." "Then," said the President, "I would first return you this paper." We do not pretend to give the exact words on either side, but we are sure we give the sense of both.

The above is a full and exact account of what passed between the President and the delegation. The President, in his letter to our Commissioners, tries to give the impression that our "understanding" or "agreement" was not a "pledge." We confess, we are not sufficiently versed in the wiles of diplomacy to feel the force of this "distinction without a difference." Nor can we understand how, in "a matter of honor among gentlemen," in which "no paper or writing is necessary," the very party who was willing to put it on that high footing can honorably descend to mere verbal criticism, to purge himself of what all gentlemen and men of honour must consider a breach of faith. The very fact that we (the representatives from South Carolina) were not authorized to commit or "pledge" the State, were not treating with the President as accredited ministers with full powers, but as gentlemen assuming, to a certain extent, the delicate task of undertaking to foreshadow the course and policy of the State, should have made the President the more ready to strengthen our hands to bring about and carry out that course and policy which he professed to have as much at heart as we had. While we were not authorized to say that the Convention would not order the occupation of the forts immediately after secession, and prior to the sending on of Commissioners, the President, as Commander-in-chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, could most positively say, that so long as South Carolina abstained from attacking and seizing the forts, he would not send reinforcements to them, or allow their relative military *status* to be changed. We were acting in the capacity of gentlemen holding certain prominent positions, and anxious to exert such influence as

we might possess to effect a peaceful solution of pending political difficulties, and prevent, if possible, the horrors of war. The President was acting in a double capacity; not only as a gentleman, whose influence in carrying out his share of the understanding, or agreement, was potential, but as the head of the army, and, therefore, having the absolute control of the whole matter of reinforcing or transferring the garrison at Charleston. But we have dwelt long enough upon this point. Suffice it to say, that considering the President as bound in honor, if not by treaty stipulation, not to make any change in the forts, or to send reinforcements to them, unless they were attacked, we of the delegation who were elected to the Convention, felt equally bound in honor to do everything on our part to prevent any premature collision. This Convention can bear us witness as to whether or not we endeavored honorably to carry out our share of the agreement.

The published debates at the very commencement of the session, contain the evidence of our good faith. We trusted the President. We believed his wishes concurred with his policy, and that both were directed to avoiding any inauguration of hostilities. We were confirmed in our confidence, and reassured in our belief by a significant event which took place subsequent to our interview. He allowed his premier Cabinet officer, an old and tried friend, to resign, rather than yield to his solicitations for the reinforcement of the garrison at Charleston. We urged this as a convincing proof of his firmness and sincerity. But how have we been deceived! The news of Major Anderson's *coup* produced a sudden and unexpected change in the President's policy. While declaring that his withdrawal from Fort Moultrie to Fort Sumter was "without orders, and contrary to orders," he yet refused, for twelve hours, to take any action in the matter. For twelve hours, therefore, without any excuse, he refused to redeem his plighted word. No subsequent acts on the part of our State—no after reasons—can wipe away the stain which he suffered to rest upon his "honor as a gentleman," while

those hours, big with portentous events, rolled slowly by. His Secretary of War, impatient of a delay, every moment of which he felt touched his own honor, resigned. He did so solely on the ground that the faith of the government—solely pledged—was broken, if it failed promptly to undo what had been done contrary to its wishes—against its settled policy—and in violation of its distinct agreement. The President accepted his resignation without comment. He did not attempt to disabuse the mind of his Secretary as to what was the true position of the Government. What a spectacle does the President's vacillating and disingenuous course present! He allows one Secretary to resign rather than abandon a policy which he has agreed upon. Scarcely have a few short weeks elapsed, and he accepts the resignation of another, rather than adhere to that very policy. He makes an agreement with gentlemen which, while he admits that they have faithfully kept it on their part, he himself evades and repudiates. And this he does rather than redress a wrong—correct an error—what he himself considers an error—committed by a subordinate, without his orders, and contrary to his wishes! It was at least due to Mr. Floyd, who, as one of his Cabinet, had officially and personally stood by his administration from its very commencement—through good report, and through evil report—to have explained to him that he was, in the President's opinion, laboring under a misapprehension. At least, to have said to him, "you are mistaken about this matter—do not leave me on a false issue." But no; he coldly, ungraciously, yet promptly, receives the resignation without a syllable of remonstrance, and thus tacitly, but unequivocally, accepts without shame the issue presented. He does not deny that the faith of his government is pledged, but he deliberately refuses to redeem it.

WM. PORCHER MILES.
LAURENCE M. KEITT.



